

NO TO WAR IN THE GULF

**Why Britain and the US
should get out**

a Socialist Worker pamphlet

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Introduction

Who wants war?

George Bush and Margaret Thatcher are set on dragging us all into a bloody war. That is the unmistakable meaning of the massive troop deployment in the Gulf, one of the biggest concentrations of arms since the Second World War. They may yet pull back from the brink, but the likelihood must be that they intend to provoke war.

If they do, it will be a war fought for oil and military power, not democracy. The Saudi Arabian state, which the US and the British claim to be defending, is a barbaric monarchy. So are the other Gulf states now welcoming US and British troops. It won't be a war fought to deter aggression either. George Bush has made it clear that even if Saddam Hussein were to withdraw from Kuwait tomorrow that would not be enough. Bush wants Hussein toppled, if not assassinated, and his army destroyed.

Bush's war aims are to break the power of Iraq once and for all. Bush knows that if US power is to play a major role in the post-Cold War era it must use this crisis to prove it is still capable of patrolling the globe. Bush has already invaded Panama and sent the marines into Liberia in the last few months. He fears the end of the Cold War will mean regional powers and anti-imperialist movements now feel able to flex their muscles without fear of superpower retaliation.

It is that possibility, most dangerous of all in the oil rich Middle East, which Bush is desperate to stop. But if conflict comes it will not be a military adventure like the US invasions of Grenada and Panama or the air strike on Libya. This would be a war whose only post-Second World War comparisons are Vietnam and Korea.

It would inevitably be a war in which tens of thousands would die. It would be a war in which terrifying chemical weapons were used, possibly by both sides. It would be a war in which the US forces in the Gulf might be tempted to use the nuclear weapons they carry with them, especially

if the Iraqis use chemical weapons or if the fighting does not lead to a quick US victory.

In all this Bush and Thatcher are trying to use the United Nations to give their warmongering some respectability. During the Cold War this would have been impossible because the USSR would have blocked any UN support for the US. But now the USSR is tail-ending US policy because Gorbachev desperately needs the goodwill of the US if he is to reintegrate the USSR into the world economy.

That is why Bush and Thatcher face much less difficulty in getting the UN to rubber-stamp their war plans. But this means it is pointless for Tony Benn and others to appeal to the UN to solve the Gulf crisis. The other big powers who make up the UN security council—China, France, Britain and the USSR—are every bit as worried as the US about the safety of oil supplies.

So if socialists are to stop the war drive we cannot rely on the representatives of the butchers of Tiananmen Square, the people who blew up the *Rainbow Warrior*, the invaders of Panama and the Falklands or those who gunned down protesters in Baku, to help us.

But we can build on the fact that millions already hate Thatcher because of the poll tax, the cuts in the education and health services and the high rents and mortgages. For them, the thought that the economy will be forced further into recession by a war in the Gulf can be a new source of anger.

Under such conditions many people will begin to see the connection between the oppression and exploitation Thatcher hands out at home and her pursuit of profit and power abroad. To those people it must be increasingly clear that if Thatcher is forced to abandon her imperial pretensions in the Gulf, either by defeat or because of protest at home, her days in Downing Street will be numbered.

1

Poor little Kuwait?

The sheikdom's identity would be lost without al-Sabahs at helm". That was the headline of an article in the *Times* shortly after Iraq moved into Kuwait.

The *Times* was right. The ruling family, the al-Sabahs, dominated Kuwait and were hand picked by the British to do so.

The Gulf was littered with a score of tiny ports the British wanted to use en route to India and so, from the 18th century on, they nurtured relations with the dominant families in each of the areas. The al-Sabahs were one such family. In 1899 Mubarak Sabah agreed to make the port of Kuwait a British protectorate in return for £15,000 a year.

After the First World War the spoils of the collapsed Turkish Empire were divided up between Britain and France. Britain got control of the whole Gulf region, and ran it by carving out little states round each of its ports. The local dominant families were installed as "legitimate" monarchies—subject to the British Empire.

When the British drew up the borders in 1922, creating Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, their main aim was to prevent the new Iraq from having access to the Gulf which could enable it to threaten British dominance. And so the state of Kuwait was born.

The border between Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia was drawn up in a tent in the desert by Sir Percy Cox, the British High Commissioner in Baghdad. Harold Dickson, the British military attache in the region recalled how it was done. Cox summoned to his tent Ibn Saud, the first ruler of Saudi Arabia.

"It was astonishing to see him being reprimanded like a naughty schoolboy by His Majesty's high commissioner and being told sharply that he, Sir Percy Cox, would himself decide on the type and general line of the frontier. This ended the impasse. Ibn Saud almost broke down

and pathetically remarked that Sir Percy was his father and mother who made him and raised him from nothing to the position he held and that he would surrender half his kingdom, nay the whole, if Sir Percy ordered."

In this way the British established the al-Sabahs to watch over British interests. Kuwait remained a British protectorate—a colony—until 1961. After the discovery of oil the British bank of the Middle East was given exclusive dealings with Kuwait. BP had a 50 percent share in Kuwaiti oil production.

Formal independence in 1961 made little difference. Britain's top four favourite families made up two thirds of the cabinet and one third of the directorships of the country's largest companies. With the enormous sums earned from the export of oil they made loans to other regimes, helping to stabilise Egypt and Jordan in the 1960s and 1970s.

They invested their vast wealth in the West. The Kuwaiti Investment Office played an important role in the Eurodollar market and financed loans to companies in the US, Europe, Mexico and the Philippines. It is estimated that the al-Sabahs have \$100 billion worth of foreign assets and investments.

In return for its role in the Middle East, the West was prepared to overlook the human rights record of Kuwait.

Kuwait under the Emir has been presented as a peace loving haven of prosperity and democracy. It was anything but. Only 60,000 of its 1.9 million people—and not one woman—were allowed the vote. Three fifths of its adult population weren't even permitted to own a home in what was one of the world's richest countries. They were "guest workers", denied all rights and any share in Kuwait's enormous oil wealth.

The country was dominated by a handful of families, of which the ruling al-Sabahs were the wealthiest. The US business magazine *Business Week* called it the the "world's No 1 rentier society". Just 15 percent of the workforce—and only 2 percent in the private sector—were Kuwaiti, and they took the best paid jobs. The rest were Palestinians, Egyptians, Iraqis, Iranians, Omanis, Lebanese, Indians, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans. They lived in fear of deportation—up to 600 a month were thrown out—and their pay was no more than a third of the very lowest paid Kuwaiti. Most lived in shanty towns. They were barred from joining unions or engaging in any political activity.

Though the vote was restricted to men in the small number of families resident in Kuwait since 1922, the remaining 700,000 Kuwaiti "citizens" were granted privileges placing them way above the guest workers. Most were Bedouin, though one in four were Shia Muslims from Iran and others were Iraqi. They paid no income tax, but had cheap housing and free

"Our strategic and security interests throughout the world will be best safeguarded by the establishment in suitable spots of 'police stations'."

"Kuwait is one such spot from which Iraq, South Persia, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf could be controlled."
■ DOUGLAS BUSK, acting British ambassador in Baghdad, 1947

education and welfare.

What there was of Kuwaiti "democracy" was a farce. The al-Sabah family could dissolve the National Assembly (parliament) at will and did so regularly. The Assembly was, in any case, powerless.

The Emir last dissolved the Assembly in 1986 after its members accused his family of not paying a telephone or electricity bill for ten years. He only called elections again this February and then packed the assembly with his own appointees. Political parties were banned in Kuwait. No public meeting of more than 20 people was allowed and newspapers were censored.

And the al-Sabahs were far from being innocent victims of "Iraqi aggression". They had a long running feud with Iraq over Rumaila, one of the world's largest oilfields, 90 percent of which lies under Iraq.

During the Gulf War between Iran and Iraq, Iraq closed down its oil wells in case they fell into Iranian hands. Kuwait then stepped up its oil production, taking Iraqi customers by pumping out millions of barrels of oil from Rumaila.

While Iraq is desperate for foreign capital and increased oil revenue, Kuwait had been happy with a lower oil price. Its rulers were cushioned by their income from foreign investment and their control of the oil industry at every stage—from production through refining, shipping and petrochemicals to the more than 4,500 garages they own throughout Europe. In any case Kuwait had enough oil reserves to last 250 years.

Despite the rivalries, Iraq offered Kuwait a non-aggression treaty just a month before the invasion. The Kuwaitis rejected it. Now, while troops mass in the Middle East, the leaders of Kuwait are setting up their business bases in Britain and the US with complete government backing. The Kuwait Investment Office is running its operations from offices in the Bank of England.

As an unnamed diplomat from a nearby Gulf emirate told the US bosses' paper the *Wall Street Journal*:

"Why should a power like Iraq put up with borders that were nothing but a colonial invention... that allow the West to play one country against the other in the interests of cheap oil."

When Thatcher and Kinnoch talk of Kuwait's "legitimate rulers" they are praising a tiny clique put in power by a previous Tory government.

Little more than a city state, Kuwait's independence was always nominal. It depended on paying tribute to the dominant imperialist power in the region. Previously this was the Ottoman Empire. From around the turn of the century it was Britain. The state's boundaries were drawn by Britain after the First World War.

In 1937, the year before oil was discovered, Kuwait's population was just 75,000. Its oil boom began only after Britain blockaded Iran's oilfields when they were nationalised in the early 1950s.

Britain granted independence in 1961, with al-Sabah rule entrenched. But British troops remained until 1971 and the Kuwait army was trained and "advised" by British officers.

equipped as a flying palace, complete with vaulted ceilings and a three storey lift.

Much of this personal wealth comes from payoffs by Western business trying to secure contracts in the area. While the vast majority of ordinary workers in Saudi Arabia have

no rights at all, the royal family is above the law.

There is no pretence of democracy in Saudi Arabia.

Slavery was only officially abolished in 1963, though in 1970 an estimated 500,000 people were still enslaved.

There are no elections and no parliament. Law is by royal decree. Political organisations and trade unions are banned and there is rigid censorship.

A decree banned strikes in 1956 after workers in Dhahran struck when the King visited. The army went in, strikers were arrested and migrant workers were deported. Oil companies helped the Saudi military pick out strike leaders. On top of the security forces, religious police both ensure shopkeepers shut for prayers five times a day and check women's clothing.

But the regime is characterised by total hypocrisy. Dire punishment befalls those discovered breaking laws which their rulers persistently flout. They are known to have secret stocks of illegal alcohol and the Saudi princes are infamous for the staggering amounts they gamble away. Following Iranian criticism of the royal family's un-Islamic lifestyle, the King had to order that no prince spend Ramadan abroad to escape the month of fasting.

The reality is the family are highly sophisticated members of the world ruling class who use Islamic fundamentalism to legitimise their rule.

Theft is punished by amputation. The beheading of alleged murderers

2

Defending Saudi Arabia?

George Bush and Margaret Thatcher claim to be defending Saudi Arabia from the brutality of an Iraqi invasion. But one look at Saudi Arabia shows they are happy to go along with the most brutal of regimes as long as it defends their interests.

Saudi Arabia covers four fifths of the Arabian peninsula and holds a quarter of the world's oil reserves. As a consequence its rulers have long enjoyed US and British backing. Indeed since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 Saudi Arabia has been the United States' chief ally in the area.

But Bush and Thatcher care nothing for the rights of ordinary workers in the country. Saudi Arabia is one of the most closed societies in the world and the only state which is titled as the property of one family. King Fahd is head of state, commander in chief and supreme religious leader. He is also protector of the Islamic holy places of Mecca and Medina, to whom the millions of pilgrims who visit each year must pay a tax.

Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 by the al Saud family after years of war with other ruling families. The al Sauds made a fundamentalist version of Islam—Wahhabism—a cornerstone of the new state. But this ruling dynasty of over 4,000 princes has only survived by being propped up by Western powers keen to secure oil supplies.

Not long after the country's formation the King sold an oil concession to Standard Oil of California for £50,000 in gold. After World War Two the US strengthened links with the rulers of Saudi Arabia, though an assistant to President Roosevelt admitted it was "hard to call that outfit a democracy".

The wealth of the ruling family is staggering. The money from oil is spent largely on arms and palaces and squandered on luxurious living. King Fahd is probably the richest man in the world. He has a private jumbo jet

Migrant workers make up 30 percent of Saudi Arabia's 14 million people and 70 percent of its workforce. They have no rights at all.

Employers take their passports and can impose changes in pay and conditions. They aren't paid equally—Asian workers get the lowest pay.

Among the worst treated are construction workers and domestic servants. Gulf newspapers carry frequent adverts for information on runaway servants.

Construction workers are often segregated in camps, with 16 to a room and a bathroom between 500.

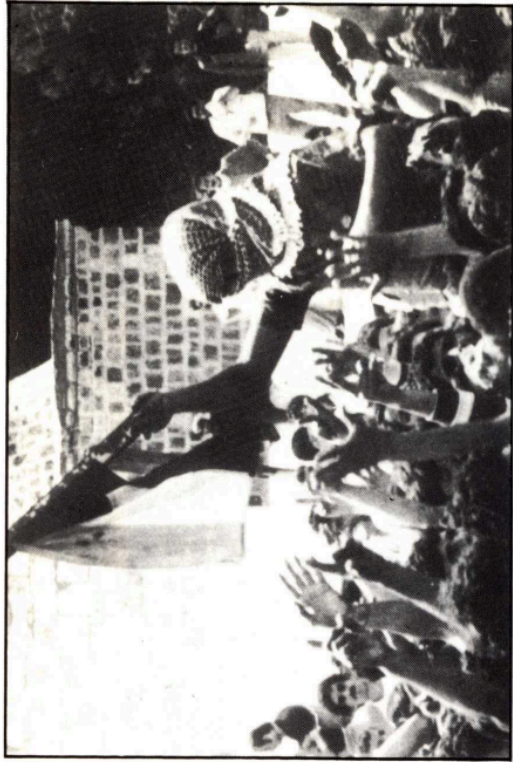
In 1980 Billy Williams returned from working on a construction site in Saudi Arabia and described the conditions to *Socialist Worker*:

"Thousands of workers were bricklaying, concreting, digging trenches in the hottest part of the day, not stripped to the waist or wearing shorts but literally covered from head to foot. How they survived in that heat I don't know."

"This was part of the Filipino labour force that was building the site. Thousands of them are housed in a place called the Barracks, based on the site itself. All that separated their living quarters from the job was a wire fence."

"For a few dollars a week they had signed one year and two year contracts with no home leave whatsoever. Some are sent home without pay because they have complained, and the Koreans have a contract of employment which can include conscription to the Saudi army."

"Workers have been flogged who have tried to organise jobs. Posters on sites say, 'This is Saudi—love it or leave it.'"



Palestinian protest

and rapists is routine. Public executions take place most weeks. The corpse of a recent victim of the security forces, an armed robber, was hung on a wall.

Any opposition meets with brutal repression. The regime discriminates against the large Shi'ite Muslim minority in the oil rich eastern area of the country. Resistance there in 1979 was suppressed using air power.

Imprisonment, solitary confinement and torture are widespread, as is flogging.

Sixteen Kuwaitis accused of planting a bomb were beheaded earlier this year despite protests by Amnesty International. There are hundreds of political prisoners held without trial. A majority of detainees report being tortured—beaten with sticks, rubber hoses or electric cables, suspended by wrists or ankles from the ceiling, immersed in cold water for long periods, forced to go without sleep.

The tortured body of 40 year old Zahra' al-Nasser was returned to her family last summer three days after she was arrested with her husband. None of this is even commented on by Western rulers.

The position of women in Saudi society makes them among the most oppressed in the world. They are restricted to work as teachers or nurses. At the new universities they must study on separate campuses, and women students are not allowed to study abroad. A Saudi minister has said, "You can't keep women in the house if you educate them."

Women are forbidden to drive and to travel alone. In local law the evidence of two women counts for the evidence of a single man.

None of this stops the British and US governments backing Saudi Arabia's rulers to the hilt.

3

Oil: the most profitable industry in the history of capitalism

Oil is the key to the crisis in the Gulf. The world's richest oilfields lie in the region—in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait and the tiny Gulf states. Sixty percent of the West's oil supplies pass through the Gulf and these fields comprise over half the world's known reserves outside the USSR.

Middle East oil is by far the cheapest to extract, at a cost per barrel about one twelfth of US oil. The war drive is about control of Middle East oil and protecting the profits of the giant oil companies. The biggest, British-Dutch Shell and US based Exxon, are worth over \$60 billion (£35 billion) each and are among the world's four biggest industrial companies. Others—BP, Mobil, Chevron, Texaco, Amoco, Arco—rank in the top 100.

The US bosses' magazine *Business Week* argues, "Oil is worth going to war for"—and no wonder. The oil giants' profits are immense. Shell made profits of \$6.5 billion (£3.6 billion) and BP \$2.9 billion (£1.7 billion) last year. Every \$1 a barrel rise in oil price brings them another £200 million.

Such enormous profits are not new. They began with the discovery of oil in the US in 1859. The early swarm of small companies quickly gave way to domination by giant corporations, above all JD Rockefeller's Standard Oil.

Standard was ruthless in driving competitors out of business. Anti-monopoly legislation broke it into 34 separate companies in 1911. But most soon rivalled the size of the original company. Exxon, Mobil, Chevron,

Amoco and Arco are all former parts of Standard.

The major rivals to the US companies grew within the British Empire. Shell developed from a merger between Dutch and British companies in 1907. BP started as the Anglo-Persian oil company. Both exploited the oilfields and markets of the empire.

The companies continued to engage in vicious competition while carving up the world's supplies and markets between them. This culminated in secret agreements between the major companies to ensure their profits.

The most notorious and long lasting was the 1928 "As Is Agreement", backed by the world's then seven biggest oil companies—Standard Oil of New Jersey (now Exxon), Shell, Anglo-Persian, Gulf, Chevron, Texaco and Mobil. These were later dubbed the "Seven Sisters". Even though Middle East oil was cheaper to extract than the older US supplies, the Sisters simply fixed prices on the pretence that all oil was produced at US costs.

The oil industry has always acted as if it owned the Middle East. Kuwait was Gulf and BP territory. Saudi Arabia was in the hands of Exxon, Chevron, Texaco and Mobil through a joint company, Aramco. Dhahran, today the centre of US military operations in Saudi Arabia, was built as an Aramco company town and long known as "Little America".

Indeed, right from the beginning the very boundaries of the Gulf countries reflected the importance of oil. They were imposed by imperialist force.

Most oilfields are clustered around the coast and for decades the Gulf was effectively a British lake. The heads of the states that border it—massive Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia and smaller Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain—rest on their oil wealth.

But they and the countries that surround them—Jordan, Syria, Oman, North and South Yemen, and of course Israel and Lebanon—have been shaped by outside powers. Their boundaries were either directly drawn by Britain and France, or guaranteed to one or another ruling clique by imperialist might and money.

British foreign secretary Lord Curzon noted at the end of the First World War, "The allies floated to victory on a wave of oil". But that oil had not come from the Middle East. It came from the United States. Britain and France wanted their own sources and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 left the Middle East wide open for them.

The first discovery in the region was made in Iran in 1908, by the company that would become BP. It paid just £20,000 to local rulers for a concession giving it exclusive rights to an area twice the size of Texas. Aware of its likely future importance, the British government had taken a 51 percent share in the company.

Now Britain and France joined in a carve up of the region that resembled the nineteenth century scramble for Africa. General Sir Edward Spears, later British minister to Syria and Lebanon, wrote: "The French and British satisfied each other's appetites by serving up strips of the Arab lands to each other".

They carried this out in the name of the League of Nations, forerunner of today's United Nations. But they didn't manage it without a fight. The

Arabs had supported the allied powers in the war and expected independence. Revolution in Russia fired the masses of the cities and resistance to British and French rule erupted in strikes, demonstrations and war.

Sharif Hussein, head of the Hashemi dynasty which now rules Jordan, declared himself king of Hejaz—a major slice of today's Saudi Arabia. In Syria a National Congress in Damascus proclaimed independence in 1920. A similar gathering in Baghdad declared Iraq independent. There were massive anti-British demonstrations in Tehran, capital of Iran.

The League of Nations, dominated by Britain and France, acted quickly. It gave France the mandate for Syria—minus Palestine, which went to Britain—and Britain the mandate for Iraq. Then France bombed Damascus and Britain carried out a massacre in Iraq. France then split Lebanon from Syria and put both under five years martial law.

Britain carved out a territory next door to Palestine and well away from any oil reserves, called it Transjordan and presented it to the Hashemis. Britain also drew the boundaries of Iraq, Kuwait and the smaller Gulf states, making sure the crucial oil areas were under its control.

Having done so the Foreign Office declared, "What is wanted is a king who will be content to reign but not govern." The puppet it hit on in Iraq was King Faisal, installed in 1921. British troops then intervened to prevent the tribe of al-Saud, soon to be founders of Saudi Arabia, over-running Kuwait.

In Iran Britain's commander encouraged a coup by Persian officer Reza Khan. With British arms and cash he declared himself Shah of Iran, founding the brutal dynasty. The profits from Iranian oil were so huge that in 1923 Winston Churchill could boast the government's investment in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had already earned it £40 million. Iran had been paid just £2 million.

Furious at being left out of the carve up the United States now demanded that its oil companies be given a slice. Reluctantly Britain accepted that a consortium of US and British oil companies, the Iraq Petroleum Company, would exploit the region.

In 1928 the company was granted drilling rights in every part of the old Ottoman Empire by what was called the Red Line Agreement. In return Iraq was to be paid four gold shillings per ton of oil. The profits of a single company, Exxon, between 1934 and 1939 were more than double the sum paid to Iraq. It would take a coup by army officers in 1958 to throw the British puppet out.

Exploitation of Saudi Arabia, sitting astride the richest oilfields of all, came a little later. The country was founded by the al-Saud family in 1932 after decades of fighting other ruling families. Its head immediately sold the oil concession to Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) for £50,000 in gold. Britain might have won the concession, but its government refused to pay Arabs in gold.

In 1941 Britain invaded Iran afresh to depose the Shah and put his son in his place. Yet for three decades imperialist control of the region seemed

secure. In 1940 Britain controlled 72 percent of Middle East oil reserves. After the war the Anglo-Iranian company was Britain's biggest single investment overseas.

But a new challenge to Western control came in the 1950s, developing first in Iran and then spreading to Egypt, Iraq and Syria.

In May 1951 Iran's nationalist prime minister, Dr Mohammed Mussadeq, nationalised the country's oilfields. Anglo-Iranian responded by stopping all production and Britain blockaded Iran's exports.

The British cabinet discussed using force to steal the fields back. But the US, keen to get its companies' hands on Iranian oil, refused to back a British invasion. Instead Britain and the US colluded in a coup to bring Mussadeq down in August 1953. The plan was drawn up by the British Secret Service and executed by the CIA.

The US pumped \$250 million into the Shah's state in the following three years. It made him the world's largest importer of arms and a loyal policeman for Western interests.

By 1967 British companies' share of Middle East oil had shrunk to 29 percent. The US oil giants now controlled 59 percent.

By this time that some of the enormous wealth was finally reaching Arab hands. But the overwhelming majority of the Arab people continued to live in abject poverty. Their rulers simply lined their own pockets and built formidable armies to protect their rule.

That has largely remained the case despite the oil price rise won by the oil producers' cartel OPEC from 1973. OPEC gradually asserted its influence by using the same price fixing methods used by the companies and playing smaller companies off against the Sisters.

The decisive shift came in 1973 as the world economy teetered on the brink of recession. OPEC members doubled the oil price, and then doubled it again when the US gave outright support for Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

On top of the price rises came increasing demands from producing countries for "participation" in or nationalisation of the oil companies. The oil giants were forced to go along with many of the demands, but the companies didn't lose out. They made sure their profits weren't hit by jacking up prices for petrol and other products. And they soon found they could live with the new arrangements.

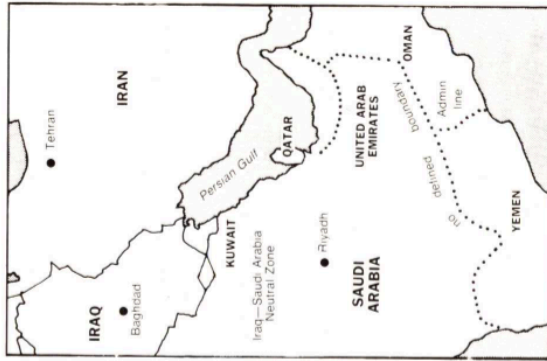
Aramco is now owned by the Saudi government, but largely run by former US oil company managers, described as "loanees".

More importantly, much of the refining and almost all the distribution of oil is still controlled by the giant companies. Before 1974 the Seven Sisters controlled 80 percent of oil production outside the USSR and Eastern Europe. Today they control around 70 percent of refining capacity and more than half the world's tanker fleet.

Renewed price rises in the wake of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the ups and downs of the world economy in the 1980s have brought further changes to the industry. One Sister, Gulf, was bought up by another, Chevron. Texaco only narrowly avoided a similar fate. But the basic pattern

of domination by a handful of giants remains unchanged.

Today the shifting pattern of oil discovery and depletion of old reserves, especially in the US, means Middle East oil is increasingly back at centre stage. This means the domination of the world by the major Western economies and the profits of the oil companies will be tied still more closely to control of the Middle East.



The other Gulf states

THE ORIGINAL carve up of the Middle East in 1920 was cloaked in fine words by the League of Nations. "The well-being and development of such [Arab] peoples form a sacred trust for civilisation", it declared.

The strategy of the Western powers ensured the bulk of the Arabian peninsula stayed under the control of reactionary monarchies. The rulers of Saudi Arabia held out against any kind of elected assembly. They have been content to live off their oil revenues and maintain a state in which more than half the population are illiterate and one in ten children die before their first birthday.

The tiny Gulf states that border it—Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar—have a wealth and importance out of all relation to their size.

QATAR, a peninsula jutting into the Gulf, fell to Britain in 1918. It was made an independent sheikhdom in 1971. Some 85 percent of its working population are immigrant workers. They live in poverty. The ruling Thani family are conservative Muslims. Britain first intervened

in Qatar in the 1860s. After the First World War it guaranteed Qatar's boundaries in return for exclusive oil exploration and development rights. Qatar oil production became commercial in the 1950s and British interference increased. In 1951 and 1960 Britain forced its rulers to abdicate.

THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES was also formed in 1971 from seven principalities that had been controlled by Britain—been its “protectorates”—for 80 years.

They are Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaima, Fujaira and Abu Dhabi—christened by Britain the Trucial States. Each has its own emir and large royal family.

Oil was found in Abu Dhabi, largest of the emirates, in 1960. Again British interest in the region rose. A Sheikh who refused to invest his oil revenue was overthrown with British backing and replaced by his brother.

The UAE's gross national product per head is the highest in the world. But the immigrant workers who make up two thirds of the population don't see any of it. It has an assembly, but its members are nominated and mostly the sons of leading families.

BAHRAIN is a group of islands off the Saudi coast. It was effectively held by Britain for more than a century before independence in 1971.

To cement its control Britain deposed an uncooperative ruler in 1923 and appointed a British adviser to rule alongside his successor.

Elections were held in the early 1970s, though only 30,000 men out of the 317,000 population were allowed the vote. But the ruling Sheikh closed the assembly in 1976. An important oil producer after the war, its reserves are now almost exhausted. But Bahrain retains strategic importance and has major oil refineries.

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN, the second largest state in the peninsula, is also vital to the oil producing region. It is the most medieval regime of all.

Britain seized the region, including the port of Muscat, in 1871. It restored a toppled ruling family—the al Bu Saids—to power and effectively ran Oman as a colony, though confining its interests to the coastal area. Unhappy with the Sultan, Britain deposed him in 1932 and put his son in his place. British officers led the smashing of rebellions up to the 1950s.

Britain backed another coup in 1970, again replacing father with son. Up to this time Oman's rulers had retained so much of the country's oil wealth for themselves they even stopped the import of medicines and restricted schooling.

Oman remains an absolute monarchy, with no parliament whatever. The importance of its oilfields is augmented by its strategic position jutting into the Strait of Hormuz at the mouth of the Gulf. Since the US replaced Britain as the number one imperialist power in the region it has maintained four sea and air bases in Oman.

4

What do we say about Saddam Hussein?

Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock have both denounced Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein as a tyrant. The tabloids call him “the new Hitler”. The United Nations has condemned him.

But in 1988 they loved him for winning the Gulf War. The reaction to his invasion of Kuwait is a world away from when he invaded Iran in 1980. Then the UN said nothing. The Western press lauded Hussein for launching war against Iran after the revolution which overthrew the Shah.

Western governments and the oil rich Gulf states, including Kuwait, armed him to the teeth. “We see no fundamental incompatibility of interests between the United States and Iraq”, said President Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski.

The US business paper the *Wall Street Journal* reported, “Washington would welcome any role the Iraqis might play in stabilising the Persian Gulf”.

These powers hoped Iraq would beat back the Iranian Revolution, prevent its spread and put a more compliant government in place of the Ayatollahs. That is why Iraq today has a million strong army and five times as many tanks as Britain.

The slaughter in the Iran-Iraq war reached the scale of the First World War. When in 1987 it seemed Iran might gain the upper hand, the United States sent a fleet to the Gulf.

Iraqi forces fired on the *USS Stark* and the US dismissed it as a mistake. But when Iran fired on Kuwaiti tankers carrying Iraqi oil, the US offered protection and joined in on the side of Iraq. US planes destroyed Iranian oil installations and shot down a civilian airliner, killing over 400 Iranian passengers.

Hussein remained the darling of the Western press and politicians throughout. Only in the past few months and amid tales of an Iraqi "supergun" have they begun to worry about the Frankenstein they created in the region. But the Tories still placed friendly relations with Hussein above the life of *Observer* journalist Farzad Bazoft.

Now they have turned turtle, threatening Hussein and suing for friendship with Iran. But President George Bush's claim that Saddam Hussein is "the new Hitler", a fascist maniac who must be stopped by any means is utterly misplaced.

Saddam Hussein does use torture and murder. But so do many of the US backed regimes of Latin America, the French backed regimes of central Africa and the British backed regimes of the Arabian peninsula. If Saddam Hussein's regime is "Hitlerite" then so are all of these. But to talk in these terms is to blur over what was particularly horrific and dangerous about Hitler's Germany.

Germany was then the world's second industrial power and the most populous state in Western Europe, but had been weakened by defeat in World War One. Its ruling class turned to Hitler because he offered them a double prospect—first to smash the powerful working class movement by mobilising against it every barbarous instinct of the middle classes and then to expand the country's frontiers until it would be the world's greatest superpower. Every success for Hitler gave heart to the most reactionary elements elsewhere in the world.

Iraq, by contrast, is a minor industrial power, with a population of only 17 million (a third of Egypt or Iran). The Ba'ath Party has used murder and torture to destroy working class organisations. But Saddam Hussein cannot aspire to dominate the world or even the whole of the Middle East. The most he could achieve by military expansion would be to increase his control over the Gulf's oil supplies.

This would hardly make him all powerful, since his only interest in controlling the oil is to be able to sell it—and he could not do that unless he offered it at a price Western companies were prepared to pay.

It is not the world he threatens, or even the working classes of the big Arab states like Egypt and Syria, whose ruling classes already smash strikes and ban unions. He is not a beacon for every reactionary element worldwide. At most he offers a limited challenge to oil sheiks and oil companies and to Western companies whose profitability depends upon cheap oil.

So Saddam is not the new Hitler. But neither is he a modern anti-imperialist hero, despite the fact that many millions in the Arab world see him as the "new Nasser", after the Egyptian leader who toppled the corrupt King Farouk in the early 1950s, threw British troops out of his country, nationalised the Suez Canal and survived a joint invasion by Britain, France and Israel.

Nasser himself only fought imperialism spasmodically. He repeatedly did deals with it—as in 1969-70 when he allowed the Jordanian government to attack the Palestinians. Saddam has never seriously fought imperialism,



although his Ba'ath party was founded in the 1940s by intellectuals who argued for Arab unity in the face of the division into rival countries brought about by Western colonial powers.

The early Ba'athists built their organisation by recruiting a section of the middle class in Syria and Iraq. These people were excluded from power by the regimes set up by the colonialists, but were very privileged compared with the mass of workers and peasants.

This class wanted to get rid of the old governments. But they did not want mass revolution from below which might threaten themselves. So they looked to conspiracies among middle class army officers to win power.

In the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s the key role in the anti-imperialist movement in Iraq was played by precisely the mass working class agitation the middle classes feared. The British appointed Iraqi monarchy was overthrown in 1958 by a group of officers led by Karim Kassem. A wave of mass struggle followed, in which the Communist Party played a major role. The Western media were horrified, treating Kassem like a Communist stooge, although he was jailing Communists.

The Ba'athists sought to build their support by spearheading right wing resistance to the Kassem government and the left. Saddam Hussein first made a name for himself in 1959 when he attempted to assassinate Kassem. Four years later the Ba'athists, working with right wing officers, overthrew Kassem. A bloodbath followed as the Ba'athist National Guard attacked working class areas and murdered thousands of militants.

Such were the "anti-imperialist" credentials of the Ba'athists that the CIA provided assistance with the coup and Western oil companies offered the new government cooperation it had refused its predecessor!

The Ba'athist ministers were thrown out of the government by their officer allies after only six months. But they remained an important force and were able to return to power after another military coup in 1968.

The new Ba'athist government claimed it would fight Zionism in a way other Arab regimes had failed to do. But in practice all this meant was gruesome public executions in Baghdad, in which Iraqi Jews were hanged alongside Nasserites and Communists.

The reality behind the propaganda was shown in 1970. King Hussein of neighbouring Jordan launched his "Black September" bloody assault on Palestinians in his country. Several thousand PLO activists were killed. At the time there were 15,000 Iraqi troops in Jordan. They took no action in defence of the Palestinians.

When war broke out between the Arab states and Israel in 1973, only two divisions of the Iraqi army played any part at all—and they did no serious fighting. Meanwhile the rest of the Iraqi army was engaged in a war against the quarter of Iraq's own population that is Kurdish.

The Ba'athists' claim to stand for Arab unity is as hollow as their claim to be in the forefront of the fight against Israel. The main aim of the middle class activists of the party was to make careers for themselves in the existing state machine.

So when in the 1960s the Ba'athists got control of both Syria and Iraq, it did not lead to unity between the two countries, but to a bitter split into two rival Ba'ath parties, each regarding the other as a more dangerous enemy than the Western powers or Israel.

This led Saddam Hussein in 1980 to organise the assassination of PLO leaders, because the PLO was at that time allied to Syria. More recently it led him to arm the Christian fascist general Aoun in Beirut because he fought Syrian influence.

Not all the middle class members of the Ba'ath party could rise to positions of privilege in the Iraqi state machine—there simply were not enough such positions. So the history of the party after taking power is a history of bitter internal conflicts, in which the winners physically wiped out their opponents, just as they wiped out worker militants or Kurds in Saddam's 1979 purge in which he executed a third of the party's command council.

Totalitarianism allowed a few to hold their positions at the top and turned the rest of the party into a mechanism for servicing their rule. For the few the rewards were great. They ran the country's nationalised industries, as well as the state, and established profitable relationships with private and foreign contractors.

The Ba'athist party, in opposition a party of middle class Arab nationalism, in power became the party linking Iraqi state and private capitalism.

In 1980 Saddam Hussein saw a way to strengthen his own position by

Modern Iraq was carved out of the old Ottoman Empire when it collapsed at the end of the First World War.

It was ruled by Britain as a colony under a League of Nations "mandate" until 1932. Power then passed to a British appointed puppet ruler, Faisal.

Oil was first extracted in 1928 by a company later swallowed up by British Petroleum. To control the country the British passed laws favouring the dominant landowning class and rigged elections to the puppet parliament.

RAF bombers were repeatedly used to quell uprisings in the north of Iraq. In 1958 when General Kassem overthrew the monarchy and, backed by the Iraqi Communist Party, set up an Arab nationalist military dictatorship.

doing a great favour to imperialism and its client states in the Arabian peninsula. They were terrified of the impact of the revolution in neighbouring Iran on their own subject peoples. Saddam sought to relieve them of this fear and to extend the power of Iraqi capitalism and the Ba'ath party by launching a war against Iran.

He did not inflict the massive defeat on Iran that he hoped to. But for eight years he could virtually forget the cost of the war as the sheikdoms financed him, the great powers armed him and all the Arab regimes except Syria and Libya united to declare him an Arab hero.

The end of the war brought back all his old problems with a vengeance. With the threat from the Iranian Revolution removed, the oil states no longer saw any reason to finance Saddam Hussein, and his economy was suddenly threatened by its massive war debts.

Saddam moved into Kuwait not to fight imperialism or to help the Arab people, but to get control of the means—oil—to pay back the debts he had incurred waging a war in alliance with imperialism.

He did not reckon the Western powers would turn so rapidly against a ruler who had served them so well. Despite himself Saddam Hussein brought their wrath down on his head and plunged the Middle East into a crisis that could lead to revolution as well as war.

This was not the action of a "new Hitler". But neither was it the action of someone out to lead an anti-imperialist struggle.

If Saddam Hussein can hang on long enough for cracks to appear in the US orchestrated international front against Iraq, then he will try and save his own neck by returning to the old ways of international double dealing. All the talk of Arab liberation will disappear.

So, although socialists must hope that Iraq gives the US a bloody nose and that the US is frustrated in its attempt to force the Iraqis out of Kuwait, we should have no illusions that Saddam Hussein is a genuine force for Arab liberation.

That task can only be achieved by the workers who have taken to the streets in every Arab capital during the crisis.

Their chances of success will increase if they realise that Saddam Hussein is playing the anti-imperialist card because it suits Iraq's ruling class, not because he represents their interests.

Our allegiance has to be to those genuinely on the left in the Middle East, who will fight for the military defeat of US forces and, in the process, press for revolution everywhere in the Middle East, including in Iraq itself.

"The foreign commercial interests in Iraq are...predominantly British...the greater part of the country's foreign trade is carried out in British ships. The foreign capital sunk in the country is almost exclusively British. Two out of three banks are entirely British...All important insurance business is in the hands of British firms...In every direction...British commercial influence remains paramount."
■ BRITISH AMBASSADOR to Iraq, 1934.

would always exist and therefore it was necessary to set up an exclusively Jewish state. Zionism's founding father, Theodor Herzl, knew this could not be achieved by small scale Jewish settlement in Palestine. To seize land occupied by Arabs for over a thousand years required the backing of the world's major imperial powers.

"England, with her possessions in Asia should be most interested in Zionism", Herzl wrote, "for the shortest route to India is by way of Palestine. England's great politicians were the first to realise the need for colonial expansion... And so I believe in England that the idea of Zionism, which is a colonial idea, should be easily understood."

At the end of the First World War British forces took control of Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. Palestine then had a population of over a million Arabs and 56,000 Jews. The British promised to grant independence to the Arabs, but secretly negotiated and promised support for "a national homeland for the Jews" in Palestine.

A bitter and bloody conflict followed with the Palestinians facing an alliance of the British and the Zionist settlers. Arab peasants were evicted from their land. They were not allowed to work as labourers on settler-owned land or sell their products at settler markets.

The Palestinians resisted. They staged a massive general strike in 1936 against the British for their betrayal of the promises of independence. It lasted six months and was followed by two years of uprising and guerrilla war.

The British responded with brutal repression. One third of all the troops in the British Empire were deployed in Palestine. The RAF bombed villages after village. In others the British army simply shot every tenth villager.

The colonial authorities estimated that 2,000 Arabs were killed and several hundred hung after being convicted by military courts.

Palestine was finally partitioned by the United Nations in 1947. They promised "justice" for both Arabs and Jews. Jewish settlers still owned only 6 percent of the land and made up 30 percent of the population. Nevertheless, the UN gave them 55 percent of Palestine.

But even this wasn't enough for the Zionists. They set about expanding the borders of the proposed state of Israel. They drove another 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and seized over 80 percent of the land.

Their methods were savage. In April 1948 the village of Deir Yassin was razed to the ground. Of its 400 inhabitants perhaps 50 survived. Eyewitnesses from the Red Cross reported the bodies of children mutilated by hand grenades.

This notorious massacre was carried out by Irgun militia controlled by Menachem Begin, a future Israeli prime minister. "There had been 400 people in this village", noted Jacques de Reynier of the International Red Cross. "About 50 had escaped. All the rest had been deliberately massacred in cold blood." Begin described the impact of this slaughter. "Arabs throughout the country started to flee for their lives."

Deir Yassin was just the beginning. In Haifa barrel bombs of gasoline

5

Israel and the Palestinians

Saddam Hussein must be stopped before he gets nuclear weapons, our newspapers and politicians tell us. But their attitude to the already existing nuclear power in the region is very different.

On the night Iraq invaded Kuwait one of the first calls the Bush administration made was to the Israeli ambassador in the US. The *New York Times* reported:

"Officials told the ambassador that Washington wanted Israel to keep its head down and its guns holstered. The more public the Israelis were and the more active they were on the military front, he said, the more difficult it would be for the United States to assemble and maintain an Arab coalition against Iraq."

But the Bush administration remained in constant contact with Israel, the *Times* revealed, and the Israeli government had promised to cooperate "to deter Iraqi aggression in any way Washington suggested".

This one article summed up Israel's role in the Middle East exactly. In order to defend their oil supplies in the Gulf, Western powers have backed a state formed on the basis of the expulsion of the Palestinians from their land. But Palestine was once a nation in its own right.

For over a thousand years, until the turn of the century, Palestine was populated overwhelmingly by Arabs, mostly Muslim, some Christian. A few thousand Jews lived beside them in peace.

That peace was shattered as a wave of anti-semitism swept through Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Millions of Jews fled the pogroms, anti-Jewish massacres, incited by the Tsars in Russia. Most went to the USA and Canada. A smaller number, 120,000, went to Palestine. They were encouraged to adopt Zionism, the idea that anti-semitism

and dynamite were rolled down the narrow alleys of the Arab quarter. Loudspeakers broadcast the shrieks and moans of Arab women interrupted by calls in Arabic to "Flee for your lives—the Jews are using poison gas and atomic weapons".

Such a climate of fear was created that Arabs *did* flee for their lives. Nearly 400 towns and villages and large parts of the bigger towns and cities were abandoned.

When a ceasefire was agreed in 1949, Palestine no longer existed. To seal the process Israel created the "law of return" which permits any Jew to "return" to their "homeland" but keeps Palestinians out.

Today Zionists present the terror campaign in the 1940s as a "war of independence" in which a small number of Jews faced the combined might of the Arab states in the region. But tragically the Palestinians were left to fight alone. For the first six months of the fighting Arab rulers did nothing.

As the war began Zionist leader Golda Meir was in secret negotiations with King Abdullah of Jordan about carving up the remains of Palestine. The areas that were not seized by the Zionists were taken by other Arab rulers. Jordan annexed the West Bank and Egypt took Gaza.

But Israeli ambitions did not end here. Once more in 1967 the Israelis expanded their borders by occupying the Gaza strip and the West Bank. Over 300,000 Palestinians fled as a result. Of these 145,000 were refugees uprooted for the second time.

Until 1967 around half the Palestinian people lived within the borders of the old Palestine. After 1967 the majority were outside. None of the proposed peace settlements today even question the sanctity of Israel's 1967 borders.

Then in 1982 Begin launched a full scale military invasion of Lebanon. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were slaughtered as their refugee camps and then West Beirut were bombed to rubble and overrun.

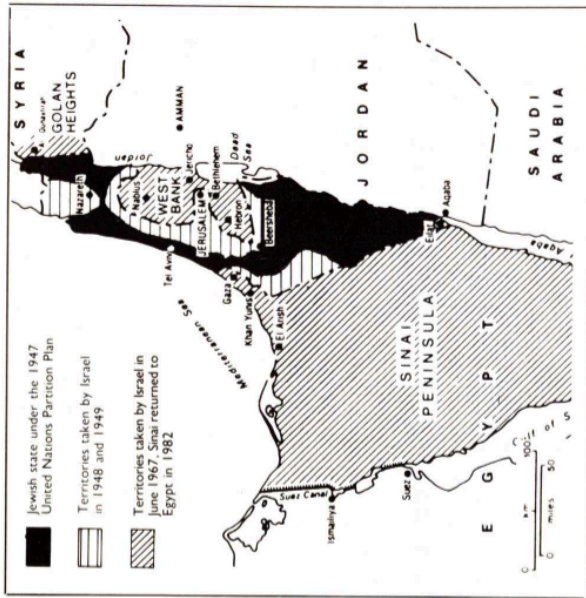
Hospitals were hit with cluster and phosphorous bombs, not by accident but repeatedly. Every teenage and adult Palestinian male was blindfolded, bound and taken to an internment camp. Eight years later some are still held hostage by Israel's client militia in southern Lebanon.

The climax of the slaughter came with the systematic murder of unarmed Palestinians in Beirut's Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. The United States, which had supported Israel throughout the invasion, stood alone alongside Israel at the United Nations in refusing to condemn the massacre.

Israel has been equally brutal in its handling of the intifada, the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza. First Israeli troops were ordered to shoot to kill Palestinian stone throwers. Later this was toned down to an instruction to break their limbs.

In almost three years of struggle hundreds of Palestinians have been killed, thousands maimed and tens of thousands imprisoned without trial.

They aren't the only Palestinian hostages in Israel. Recently Israeli army chief Nachman Shai explained that every member of the public would be issued with a gas mask should Iraq seem likely to use chemical weapons.



The expansion of Israel

Then officials admitted there were no gas masks for the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

The only difference between Israel holding Palestinians hostage against an attack by Iraq and Iraq holding Westerners hostage against an attack by the US is one of scale. Israel is holding a million hostages and Iraq a few thousand.

Saddam Hussein is denounced because of his formidable military strength, but Israel is the strongest power in the Middle East. Between 1978 and 1982 Israel received 48 percent of all US military aid worldwide and 35 percent of all US economic aid.

American politicians claim they support Israel because of the pressure of the Jewish lobby inside the US. In fact they listen to that lobby only because of the role Israel plays as the US's watchdog in the Middle East.

Only the US, USSR and China are militarily stronger. Israel has both chemical and nuclear weapons, thanks to US aid. The result is that, while Bush, Thatcher and Gorbachev ponder the dangers of military action in the region, Israel positively wants war.

"From Israel's point of view there could be no better scenario", says Ze'ev Sciff, influential military analyst of the newspaper *Ha'aretz*.

The greatest fear in Israel is that the United States does a deal with Iraq. If Hussein "stays in power and retains his weapons there will be grounds for concern", says defence minister Moshe Arens. "I hope this will not be the way the crisis ends."

Israel will do all it can to make sure that is not the way it ends.

The UN could operate only when the United States needed it—for example in the Korean War, the Suez Crisis and now in the Gulf. Without US blessing nothing happened. So 15 years of UN sanctions against Rhodesia after its unilateral declaration of independence achieved nothing, nor did hundreds of UN resolutions condemning South Africa's illegal occupation of the UN protectorate of Namibia or similar resolutions condemning Israel's occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.

UN troops first saw action in the Korean War in 1950. The Cold War was beginning to hot up with the US and Russia fighting on the fringes of their empires. When Russia temporarily boycotted the UN, the US seized the opportunity to pin the UN flag to its own troops.

The US provided the bulk of the UN troops in South Korea, their funding and the command structure. US General MacArthur was in charge. For him the war was an anti-Communist crusade. He wanted to drop nuclear weapons on North Korea and invade China. The UN flag was a convenient figleaf for the US troops fighting in Korea, but when it came to negotiating the peace the US was even more dominant than it had been in the fighting.

UN troops were used next in Suez, after Britain, France and Israel invaded Egypt in 1956 to "teach a lesson" to President Nasser who had just nationalised the Suez Canal. Eisenhower, the US President, said the invasion "was a fatal blow to the United Nations". In reality he saw his chance to replace British and French influence in the Middle East with US influence.

The UN was "asked" to put together a "peacekeeping force" for the Middle East and despatched it within 48 hours. Once again US troops dominated. In Britain, Labour's right wing leadership could happily raise the slogan "Law not war" and oppose military action in the name of the UN because this was the American line.

One of the most bloody UN operations was in the Congo in 1960. This Belgian colony had been governed by the crudest divide and rule techniques and consequently, when independence was declared, the country began to break up.

The mineral rich province of Katanga, where Belgian and British business interests were concentrated, tried to split from the rest of the country. This move was physically supported by Belgian troops and mercenaries and verbally backed by Britain and the white settlers of Rhodesia.

Patrice Lumumba, the left wing president of the Congo, appealed to the UN for help. The US was delighted. The Central Intelligence Agency already had Lumumba marked down as a Communist. India, Ireland, Sweden and Ethiopia provided the soldiers for the UN force, but the US set the strategy and the targets.

The US wanted a Congo without special Belgian and European interests and so the Katanga secession was smashed. Along the way President Lumumba was abducted, thrown into a UN plane and later murdered. He was replaced by the pro-American Mobutu who, to this day, runs one of the bloodiest regimes in Africa.

In the last 20 years UN troops have policed Cyprus, the Middle East and the India-Pakistan border. But they have only acted when the superpowers

6

Is the United Nations the answer?

Both the government and the Labour Party have placed great emphasis on the role of the United Nations in solving the Gulf crisis.

For Thatcher the initial UN vote for sanctions against Iraq, which allowed the US to marshal the international forces camped out in Saudi Arabia, was sufficient to allow George Bush to unleash Armageddon in the Middle East. For Neil Kinnock, Denis Healey, Paddy Ashdown and Ted Heath, "practical politics" demanded another UN vote before war.

Tony Benn and the handful of Labour MPs who voted against war, in contrast, argued that only the UN could prevent bloodshed. Benn said the Cold War had compromised the role of the UN but now it had the chance to fulfil the vision of its founders. "The real United Nations function should be to act as a custodian for social justice, not just a policeman."

Whatever role these different politicians claim or hope for the UN, its true function becomes obvious as soon as you look at its history.

During the Second World War the United States, Britain, and Russia referred to themselves as the "united nations". After the war Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, who between them carved the globe up into spheres of influence, also agreed to the establishment of the United Nations Organisation.

Whatever the UN Charter says, its function was not to defend human rights, freedom, democracy and the right to self determination. Rather it was to act as a figleaf for the superpowers as they tried to police the world. From day one resolutions passed in the General Assembly of all the member nations have been worthless rhetoric unless they were backed by the superpowers sitting on the UN Security Council.



wanted to separate lesser nations warring over regional dominance.

When the US navy sailed into the Gulf in 1987, ostensibly to defend freedom of navigation, but in reality to back Iraq in its war against Iran, US president Ronald Reagan refused point-blank to allow it to fly the UN flag. The reason was simple. Reagan wanted to protect US oil interests by preventing an Iranian victory, but he also wanted to mark the end of the "Vietnam syndrome" and show the world the US was prepared to use its military muscle.

Once the US had tipped the balance of the war it allowed the UN to take some credit for the eventual ceasefire.

In the current Gulf crisis the US needs the UN to give spurious legitimacy to its renewed effort to secure its Middle East oil supplies. But if the "consensus" at the UN breaks down, it will try and act alone, as it did in Vietnam.

History has shown the UN is certainly not independent and impartial and does not enforce "common sense" and "honesty" around the world. Like every other police force it defends the status quo and its paymasters, especially the United States.

The end of the Cold War will change nothing. It certainly won't bring about Tony Benn's hope for a UN that is the custodian of social justice. Power still lies in the security council—with the US, the USSR, China, Britain and France.

They claim it was because of the unprecedented "aggression" of Iraq against Kuwait. But aggression is the name of the game for all of these powers.

The United States was the driving force behind the resolution. Only eight months ago US troops stormed into Panama, killing 7,000 people in one night and then setting up a puppet government which "invited them in". Ten years earlier the US started to arm 30,000 Contras to wage war against the elected government of Nicaragua.

The USSR eagerly backed the resolution. Just 18 months ago Russian troops withdrew from Afghanistan after ten years of trying to occupy. Gorbachev's government still insists on enforcing its rule on Lithuania, 50 years after Stalin used military force to seize the country.

The butchers of Tiananmen Square also gave their support. China has been in military occupation of Tibet for 30 years, ruthlessly crushing all opposition.

Eagerly applauding the UN resolution was Israel, which has forcibly occupied the Palestinian West Bank for 23 years.

Eight years ago it staged an unprovoked and brutal invasion of Lebanon, killing tens of thousands of people. It still holds on to a strip of southern Lebanon in defiance of any alleged "international law". At no point have the great powers even talked about sanctions against Israel.

Those most eager to blockade Iraq are the very people who for decades have resisted calls for sanctions against a South African regime based on aggression by the white minority against the black majority.

But the United Nations is a forum for representatives of the very governments that prepare wars and conquer other countries. It can easily be used to provide a cloak of respectability for the military preparations of the world's biggest powers. Their efforts are directed against any lesser power that steps out of line.

That is the road, not to peace, but to war.

The Tories' dependence on this political consensus makes the Labour Party's capitulation to Thatcher's warmongering all the more despicable. Kinnoch has the power to stop the war preparations in their tracks. He has the power to stop the senseless slaughter before it begins.

If Kinnoch had spoken against the war drive at the start, the Tories would never have dared send troops to the Gulf. Even now Britain could be forced to withdraw if Labour threw its weight behind the anti-war movement. But Kinnoch has done none of this. Kinnoch, however, is not the labour movement. Thirty five MPs voted against the government in the Commons debate on the Gulf crisis.

More importantly, many in the Labour Party and trade unions agreed with Eric Heffer when, in his Commons speech, he said any Gulf war would be a war for oil profits, a capitalist and imperialist war. If they join together with socialists and peace activists outside the Labour Party to build an anti-war movement we can still break the political consensus on which the Tories' war drive depends.

The massive movement against the Vietnam War began as a very small movement. But it, and the prospect of instability in South East Asia, forced the US out of Vietnam. That combination of domestic protest and regional instability can work again. But for the movement to be effective it must be clear about how to stop the war drive.

Many on the left, including Eric Heffer and Tony Benn, give the impression the United Nations can bring peace. Labour MP Ken Livingstone is critical of the slogan 'US and Britain out of the Gulf'.

Yet, if Bush and Thatcher get their way, the US army will go into battle with the UN flag flying over its troops. And they have made it absolutely clear they will fight whether or not they have UN agreement.

Either the UN will back the US forces or it will impotently stand aside. In both cases socialists would be misguided in assuming the UN will do anything to prevent a war. The only thing that can secure peace is if the US and Britain are forced to get out of the Gulf.

The conflicts in the Middle East exist precisely because the major imperialist powers have dominated the region throughout this century. They carved the tiny Gulf monarchies out of the sand. They backed Israel, and armed Saddam Hussein himself. They are the problem, not the solution.

To replace Saddam Hussein with a US puppet will not benefit Iraqis, only the oil companies. What would Iraqis gain from being ruled by an Arab Ferdinand Marcos, Baby Doc Duvalier or Anastasio Somoza?

Now the US and Britain are ready to wreak havoc on the Middle East once again. They can only be stopped if the domestic political price of the war is made so high that Bush and Thatcher are no longer able to pay it.

The task of exacting that price will be all the easier for an anti-war movement that has no illusions in the UN and calls, clearly and unambiguously, for Bush and Thatcher to get out of the Gulf.

Z Labour and the anti-war movement

There have already been many protests, meetings and demonstrations against Bush's and Thatcher's war. They have drawn support from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Labour MPs including Tony Benn and Eric Heffer, the Greens, and Welsh nationalists Plaid Cymru, as well as the Socialist Workers Party.

Such opposition is vital if we are to prevent tens of thousands of lives being lost in a war from which only the Tories and oil companies can benefit.

"The country dare not go to war divided," foreign secretary Douglas Hurd told Tory MPs, letting slip how vital domestic political consensus is to the government. The *Guardian* reported that many Tory MPs think they are heading for a crisis more like the 1956 Suez affair, which broke the back of the then Tory government, than the Falklands War.

They know the government is far more unpopular than during the Falklands crisis. They know active opposition to their policies, particularly the poll tax, runs deep. They know a war in the Gulf could be bloody, prolonged and futile. And they know the public know this war would be about oil profits, not democracy.

The Tories encouraged people to see the sheep farmers of the Falklands as an essentially English community on islands which, although a long way away, were essentially English. They know no one could possibly feel that way about the super-rich Emir of Kuwait.

For all these reasons the Tories heaved a huge sigh of relief when Labour backed their war drive. It was just after Kinnoch voted to back the government that Thatcher announced the first British ground troops would be sent to the Gulf.